اِنَّ هٰذَا الْقُرْاٰنَ يَهْدِيْ لِلَّتِيْ هِيَ اَقْوَمُ وَيُبَشِّرُ الْمُؤْمِنِيْنَ الَّذِيْنَ يَعْمَلُوْنَ الصّٰلِحٰتِ اَنَّ لَهُمْ اَجْرًا كَبِيْرًا

Quran English Translation and Tafseer

Sayyid Abul Ala Mawdudi

Surah Al-Kafirun (The Unbelievers) -109

سُوْرَةُ الْكٰفِرُوْنَ مَكِّيَّةٌ

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيْمِ

(In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate**)**

قُلْ يٰٓاَيُّهَا الْكٰفِرُوْنَ ۝١

(109-1) Say: “O unbelievers!” (1)

(1) A few points in this verse are particularly noteworthy:

(1) Although the Prophet (peace be upon him) has been commanded to tell this to the disbelievers plainly, the theme that follows makes it explicit that every believer should tell the disbelievers plainly what has been said in the following verses; so much so that the person who has just believed and repented of kufr is also bound to express similarly his disgust with and disapproval of the creed and rites of worship and gods of kufr. Thus, though the first addressee of the word qul (say) is the Prophet (peace be upon him) himself, the command is not restricted to him alone but it reaches every believer through him.

(2) The word kafir is no abuse, which might have been used for the addressees of this verse, but it implies the one who refuses to believe or is an unbeliever. As against it the word Mumin is used for the believer. Therefore, the Prophet’s (peace be upon him) saying, by Allah’s command, O disbelievers... in fact, means: O you, who have refused to believe in my apostleship and in the teachings brought by me. Likewise, when a believer uses this word, it will imply those who do not believe in the Prophet Muhmmad (peace be upon him).

(3) The word used is O kafirs and not O mushriks; therefore, the addressees are not only the mushriks but all those people who do not acknowledge Muhammad (peace be upon him) as Allah’s Messenger and the teachings and guidance brought by

him as the teaching and guidance given by Allah Himself, whether they be Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians or the disbelievers, polytheists and pagans of the entire world. There is no reason why this address be restricted to the pagans of Quraish or of Arabia only.

(4) To address the deniers with the word O kafirs is just like addressing certain people as O enemies, or O opponents. Such an address is not, in fact, directed to the person of the addressee but it is made on the basis of their characteristic of enmity and opposition, and lasts only until they are so characterized. If one of them gives up enmity and opposition, or turns a friend and supporter, he no longer remains the addressee of this word. Likewise, the address of O kafirs to the people also is in view of their characteristic of kufr and not their person. This address would be perpetual for him who continues to be a kafir till death, but the one who believes will no longer be its addressee.

(5) Many scholars from among the commentators have expressed the opinion that in this Surah the address of O disbelievers applied only to a few persons of Quraish, who were visiting the Prophet (peace be upon him) with proposals of compromise regarding religion and about whom Allah had informed His Messenger (peace be upon him) that they would not believe. They have formed this opinion for two reasons. First, that it is followed by La a budu ma ta budun: I do not worship him or those whom you worship. They say that this does not apply to the Jews and Christians, for they worship Allah. Second, that this is also followed by: wala antum abiduna ma aabud: Nor are you worshippers of Him Whom I worship. Their reasoning is that this statement does not apply to the people who at the revelation of this Surah were disbelievers but later believed. Both these arguments are incorrect. As for these verses, their explanation that follows will show that they do not bear the meaning which has been understood from them. Here, to point out the error of the reasoning it would be enough to say that if the addressees of this Surah were only these people, why then does this Surah still continue to be recited when they are dead and gone from the world long long ago? And what was the need of making this Surah

a part of the Quran permanently so that the Muslims should continue to read it for ever afterwards?

لَآ اَعْبُدُ مَا تَعْبُدُ ۙ وَنَ ۙ﴿۲﴾

(109-2) I do not worship those that you worship [2]

(2) This includes all those deities whom the disbelievers and the polytheists have been, and are still, worshipping everywhere in the world, whether they are the angels, the jinn, prophets, saints, spirits of the living or dead men, or the sun, the moon, stars, animals, trees, rivers, idols and imaginary gods and goddesses. One may say that the pagans of Arabia also acknowledged Allah as a deity and the other pagans of the world also have never Di acknowledged Allah as a deity till today. As for the followers of the earlier scriptures, they also acknowledge Allah alone as the real deity. How then can it be correct to exonerate oneself from the worship of all the deities of all those people, without exception, when Allah too is included among them?

The answer is that if Allah is worshipped along with others regarding Him as a deity among other deities, the believer in Tauhid will inevitably express his immunity from this worship, for in his sight Allah is not a deity out of a collection of deities, but He alone is the real deity, and the worship of the collection of deities is no worship of Allah, although worship of Allah is also included in it. The Quran has clearly stated that Allah's worship is only that which does not have any tinge of the worship of another and in which man makes his worship exclusively Allah's. And the only command they were given, was to worship Allah, making their religion sincerely His, turning all their attention towards Him. (Surah Al-Baiyinah, Ayat 5).

This subject has been explained at many places in the Quran forcefully; for example, see (Surah An-Nisa, Ayats 145-146); (Surah Al-Araf, Ayat 29); (Surah Az-Zumar, Ayats 2, 3, 11, 14, 15); (Surah Al-Mumin, Ayat 14, 64-66). It has been further explained in a Hadith Qudsi (i.e. divine word revealed through the mouth of the Prophet) in which the messenger of Allah says: Allah says, I am Self-Sufficient of the

association of every associate most of all. Whoever performed an act in which he also associated another with Me, I am free of it, and the entire act is for him who was associated. (Muslim, Musnad Ahmad, Ibn Majah). Thus, acknowledging Allah as one of the two, three or many gods and serving and worshipping others along with Him is, in fact, the real kufr, declaration of immunity from which is the object of this Surah.

وَ لَاۤ اَنۡتُمۡ عٰبِدُوۡنَ مَاۤ اَعۡبُدُ ۚ﴿۱۰۹:۳﴾

(109-3) neither do you worship Him Whom I worship; (3)

(3) The words used are: ma abudu. The word ma in Arabic, is generally used for lifeless or unintelligent things, and the word mun for intelligent and rational beings. The question arises why has ma abudu been used here instead of man abudu? The commentators generally give four answers to it:

(1) That ma here is in the meaning of mun.

(2) That ma here is in the meaning of alladhi (i.e. which or who).

(3) That in both the sentences ma is in the meaning of a noun of action (masdar) and it means: I do not perform the kind of worship that you perform, i.e. polytheistic worship, and you do not perform the kind of worship that I perform, i.e. worship of One God.

(4) That since in the first sentence ma tabuduna has been used, in the second ma abudu has been used to keep the style; in both places there is only the uniformity of the word, there is no uniformity of meaning; instances of this are found elsewhere also in the Quran. For example, in (Surah Al-Baqarah, Ayat 194), it has been said: Therefore, if anyone transgresses a prohibition by attacking you, you may do likewise. Obviously, to transgress likewise in retaliation is no transgression, but the word transgression (in

retaliation) has been used only for the sake of uniformity in style. In (Surah At-Taubah, Ayat 67), it has been said: They forgot Allah, so Allah forgot them. Whereas Allah does not forget. What is meant to be said is that Allah ignored them. The word nisyan in respect of Allah has been used corresponding to their nisyan (forgetfulness) only to keep the uniformity of the study.

Although all these four interpretations are correct in their own way, and there is room in Arabic to take all these meanings, yet none of these explains the real object for which ma abudu has been used instead of mun abudu. As a matter of fact, when mun is used for a person in Arabic, it is meant to say or ask something about his person, and when ma is used, it is meant to ask or express something about his characteristics and traits. This can be explained in English by the questions: who is he, and what is he, about a person. When it is asked, who is he, the object is to know something about his person. But when it is asked, what is he, the object is to know whether, for example, he belongs to the army, and if so, what is his rank, or whether he belongs to some teaching organization, and if so, whether he is a lecturer in it, or a reader, or a professor, what science or art subject he teaches, what are his qualifications, etc.

Thus, if in this verse, it was said: La antum abiduna mun abud, it would mean: You are not worshippers of the being whom I worship, and in response, the disbelievers and the polytheists could have said that they too believed in the Being of Allah and also worshipped Him. But when it was said: La antum abiduna ma abud, it meant: You are not worshippers of the deity who has the attributes of the deity whom I worship.

And this is the real point on the basis of which the religion of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is absolutely distinguished from the religions of all kinds of disbelievers, besides the deniers of God, for his God is utterly different from the God of all of them. The God of some of them is such that He stood in need of rest on the seventh day after having created the world in six days, Who is not God of the universe but God of Israel, Who stands in a special relationship to the people of one particular race, which is not shared by other

men, Who wrestles with the Prophet Jacob and cannot throw him, Who has also a son, named Ezra. The God of some others is father of an only son, called Jesus Christ, and He causes His son to be crucified in order to make him an atonement for the sins of others. The God of some has wife and children, but begets only daughters. The God of some assumes human form and shape and living in a human body on the earth works like men. The God of some is merely an Essence, or Cause of causes, or the First Cause, Who after giving the system of the universe the initial push is sitting aside unconcerned, the universe is working by itself according to some relentless laws, and now He and man have nothing to do with each other. In short, even the unbelievers who acknowledge God do not, in fact, acknowledge the God, Who is the Creator, Master, Disposer, Administrator and Ruler of the entire universe, Who has not only set the system of the universe but is running and controlling it by Himself every moment, Who is above every defect, fault, weakness and error, Who is free from every similitude, every physical limitation, every likeness, Who is Self- Sufficient of every companion and associate, Who has no partner in His Being, attributes, powers and entitlement to worship, Who is far too Holy that He should have children, or should take some one for a son, or should have an exclusive relationship with a community or race, Who is directly related to each individual creature of His as its Providence, Sustainer and Guardian, Who hears the prayers and answers them, Who alone possesses all the powers to give life and death, to cause profit and loss, and to make and mar destinies, Who not only sustains His creatures but also guides each according to its nature and need, Who is not only our God Whom we worship but also enjoins commands and prohibitions through His Prophets and His Books, which we have to obey, before Whom we are accountable for our deeds, Who will resurrect us after death, call us to account and reward and punish us accordingly. No one in the world except for Muhammad (peace be upon him) and his followers are worshipping the God with these attributes. If at all some others also are worshipping God, they are not worshipping the real and true God but the God who is their self-invented, imaginary God.

وَ لَا ۤ اَنَا عَابِدٌ مَّا عَبَدْ تُّمْ ۙ﴿۴﴾

(109-4) nor will I worship those whom you have worshipped;

وَ لَاۤ اَنْتُمْ عٰبِدُوْنَ مَاۤ اَعْبُدُ ؕ﴿۵﴾

(109-5) nor are you going to worship Him Whom I worship. (4)

(4) A section of the commentators is of the view that both these sentences are a repetition of the theme of the first two sentences and the repetition is meant to strengthen the statement in the first two sentences. But many commentators do not regard it as a repetition. They say that a new theme has been expressed in these which is different from the theme of the first two sentences. In our opinion they are correct in so far as there is no repetition in these sentences, for in these only “nor are you worshippers of Him Whom I worship” has been repeated, and this repetition also is not in the sense in which this sentence was used first. But after negating the repetition the meanings that this section of the commentators has given of these two sentences are very different from each other. There is no occasion here to take up and discuss each of the meanings given by the commentators. Avoiding details we shall only discuss the meaning which is correct in our opinion.

In the first sentence, it has been said: “Nor am I a worshipper of those whom you have worshipped.” Its theme is absolutely different from the theme of verse 2, in which it was said: “I do not worship those whom you warship,” These two things widely differ in two aspects. First, that although there is denial, and a forceful denial, in saying that “I do not, or shall not, do such and such a thing,” yet there is much greater force in saying that “I am not a doer of such and such a thing,” for it means: “It is such an evil thing that nothing to say of committing it; it is not possible that I would even think of it, or have intention of doing it.” Second, that the sentence “whom you worship”

applies to only those gods whom the disbelievers are worshipping now. On the contrary, the sentence “whom you have worshipped” applies to all those gods whom the disbelievers and their forefathers have been worshipping in the past. Now, it is a well known fact that the gods of the polytheists and disbelievers have always been changing and their number increasing and decreasing. In different ages different groups of them have been worshipping different gods, and the gods of all the disbelievers have never always been the same everywhere. Therefore, the verse means: I exonerate myself not only from your gods of today but also from the gods of your forefathers, and I am not a person who would even think of worshipping such gods.

As for the second sentence, although its words in verse 5 are the same as in verse 3, yet its meaning at the two places is different. In verse 3, it follows this sentence: “I do not worship those whom you worship.” Therefore, it means: “Nor are you worshippers of the God having the attributes of the One God Whom I worship.” And in verse 5, it follows this sentence: “Nor am I a worshipper of those whom you have worshipped.” Therefore, it means: “Nor does it seem you would become worshippers of the One God Whom I worship.” Or, in other words, “It is not possible that 1 should become a worshipper of each of those gods whom you and your forefathers have worshipped, and on account of your aversion to adopting worship of One God, instead of many gods, it cannot be expected that you would desist from this wrong worship and will become worshipper of Him Whom I worship.

لَكُمْ دِينُكُمْ وَلِيَ دِينِ ۝٦

(109-6) To you is your religion, and to me, my religion. (5)

(5) That is, my religion is entirely distinct and separate from your religion. I am not a worshipper of your gods and you are not worshippers of my God. I cannot worship your gods and you are not prepared to worship my God, Therefore, you and I can never follow and walk one and the same path together. This is not a

message of tolerance to the disbelievers, but a declaration of immunity, disgust with and dissociation from them as long as they are disbelievers. Its object is to disappoint them absolutely and finally that in the matter of religion the party of Allah's Messenger (peace be upon him) and his followers would ever come to terms with them. This same declaration of immunity and expression of disgust has been made in the Makki Surahs revealed after this Surah successively.

Thus, in Surah Younus, it was said: If these people deny you, say to them: 1 am responsible for my deeds and you are responsible for yours: you are not accountable for what I do, and I am not accountable for what you do. (Verse 41). Then further on in the same Surah it was said: O Prophet, say: O mankind, if you are still in doubt concerning my faith, know that I do not worship those whom you worship beside Allah, but I worship that Allah alone, Who has the power to cause your death. (Verse 104).

In Surah Ash-Shuara it was said: If they disobey you, tell them: I am not responsible for what you do. (Verse 216).

In Surah Saba it was said: Say to them: you will not be questioned for the errors we have committed, nor shall we be answerable for what you are doing. Say, our Lord will gather us together, then He will judge between us rightly. (Verses 25-26).

In Surah az-Zumar: Tell them plainly: O my people, do whatever you will, so shall I. Soon you shall come to know as to whom comes the disgraceful torment and who gets the enduring punishment. (Verses 39- 40).

Then the same lesson was taught in Al-Madinah to all the Muslims: There is indeed an excellent example for you in Abraham and his companions when they said to their people plainly: We have nothing to do with you and your gods, whom you worship beside God; we have renounced you and there has arisen between us and you enmity and hatred for ever, until you believe in Allah, the One. (Surah Al-Mumtahinah, Ayat 4).

These continuous explanations of the Quran do not leave any room whatever for the doubt that the verse Lakum dinu kum wa liya din does not mean: You may go on following your religion and allow me to follow mine, but it is the kind of declaration made in Surah Az-Zumar, Ayat 14: O Prophet, say to them: I shall serve Allah alone, making my religion sincerely His. As for you, you may serve whomever you please beside Him. (Verse 14).

From this verse Imam Abu Hanifah and Imam Shafei have deduced that kufr (unbelief), as a whole, is one community, however discordant and different from each other be the religions of the unbelievers; therefore, a Jew can inherit a Christian, and a Christian a Jew, and likewise the unbeliever of one religion can inherit the unbeliever of another religion, if there exists between them a relationship by descent or marriage, or some other connection, which necessitates the passage of inheritance of one to another. On the contrary, Imam Malik, Imam Auzai and Imam Ahmad hold the view that the followers of one religion cannot inherit the followers of another religion. They deduce this from the Hadith which has been related on the authority of Hadrat Abdullah bin Amr bin Al-Aas, saying that Allah's Messenger (peace be upon him) said: The people of two different communities cannot inherit each other. (Musnad Ahmad, Abu Daud, Ibn Majah, Daraqutni).

A Hadith with almost the same content has been related by Tirmidhi from Jabir, by Ibn Hibban from Abdullah bin Umar, and by Bazzar from Abu Hurairah. Dealing with this legal problem comprehensively, the well known Hanafi Imam; Shamsul-Aimmah Sarakhsi, writes: The unbelievers can inherit each other mutually for all those reasons for which the Muslims inherit each other mutually, and they can also inherit each other in certain other cases in which the Muslims do not inherit each other. The fact is that Allah recognizes only two ways of life, the religion of truth and the religion of falsehood; that is why He has declared: Lakum dinu-kum wa liya din. And He has classified the people also into two groups, one group will go to Paradise and this consists of the believers, and the second group will go to Hell and this consists of the disbelievers collectively. And He has declared the two groups only as the potential opponents of each other: These are the two parties who have disputed about their Lord. (Surah Al-Hajj, Ayat 19).

That is, one group comprises all the disbelievers collectively and they are opposed to the believers. We do not admit that they are separate and distinct communities according to their beliefs, but as against the Muslims they all form one community. For the Muslims affirm faith in the apostleship of Muhammad (peace be upon him) and in the Quran and they (disbelievers) refuse to affirm faith. For this very reason they have been declared to be unbelievers and are one community as opposed to the Muslims. The Hadith, La yata-warith ahl millatain, points to the same thing as explained above. For the Prophet (peace be upon him) has explained the word millatain (two communities) by his saying: La yarithul Muslim al-kafir wa lal-kafir al-Muslim: The Muslim cannot inherit the disbeliever, nor the disbeliever can inherit the Muslim. (AlMabsut vol. 30, pp. 30-32). The Hadith cited here by Imam Sarakhsi has been related by Bukhari, Muslim, Nasai, Ahmad, Tirmidhi, Ibn Majah and Abu Daud on the authority of Usamah bin Zaid.